

[Publicity Man]

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(Fruit Merchant)

Mrs. Luline Mabry. (Interviewer)

Frank Massimino. (Writer)

Publicity Man

"Dad," a reporter for a weekly newspaper in western North Carolina recently pleaded with Dad Rydell, aged merchant and Main Street philosopher of the little mountain resort town, "be a good sport and give me the low down on that trip you just made." Dad, who had just returned from a Florida trip, where he had visited his son, Rex, and who had run into a little misadventure along the way, grinned but declined to be used for "copy."

"But think of the publicity, Dad!" And here the reporter struck a responsive chord. Dad yielded. Any [Mention?] mention of publicity made him happy. Because publicity for himself meant publicity for [his?] community, and Dad was an ardent booster for his adopted city and state.

Some time later, back at his fruit store, C9 - 1/[?]/[?] - N.C.

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Dad took from his pocket the printed copy of the story he had given to the reporter. It had been sent on to a nearby daily, and appeared under their date line.

RYDELL NEW MEMBER OF 'WRONG WAY' CLUB

SUMMITSVILLE. March 2. (Special) -"Dad" Rydell, 83 year-old English-born citizen of this city, said Thursday that he now knows how "Wrong Way Corrigan" felt when he landed his plane in Ireland.

"In fact," the fruit merchant said, "Corrigan made history for the air lines and I have made history for the bus lines."

He had just returned from a trip to Florida, where he visited two sons. However, he came very near to being at the time back in the Sunshine state instead of Summitsville.

The Merchant, who prides himself on being a one-man publicity bureau for this section, spent several hours in sleep between Jacksonville and Augusta, Ga., on his return here.

He admits that his eyes were hardly open when he changed buses in Augusta, thinking that he would continue his journey north.

"After I had ridden for some time 3 on the bus that I boarded in Augusta I began to marvel at the way Georgia had grown since last I had passed through the state," Mr. Rydell told his friends here. "However, it is still a puzzle to me that it never dawned on me that I had headed south again."

"Then it wasn't until a lady on the bus asked the driver what time she could get a bus out of Jacksonville for Miami. Gracious, I thought, that woman had the wrong bus."

"It was a short time later that the light came. I told the driver of the bus and he had me get off in Waycross, Ga., far south of Augusta, and wait for the next bus back north."

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"Dad" said he was afraid to go all the way back to Jacksonville for fear that one of his sons would get his episode "spread all over the papers."

Dad's first feeling was one of self-reproach that he had, in giving the story to the reporter, held himself up as a rather ludicrous figure. But as he scanned the story for the second time, he grinned, satisfied this time that he had achieved another publicity stunt successfully.

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Dad is like that. Self-sacrificing, so to speak, in matters that concern the welfare, in terms of publicity, of his adopted neighborhood. Not long ago, when a move got under way to remove the lofty sycamore trees that line Main Street, Dad marched into the offices of the mayor and asked that the trees be saved.

"What about the danger of fallen wires caused by the pressure of the boughs in high winds?" he was asked.

Dad, who may be inconsistent in thought but none the less consistent in purpose, simply replied:

"To hell with the wires! If worse comes to worse, take 'em down. The summer people don't give a damn if the whole town is lighted with kerosene lamps. But if you remove those trees you'll remove our summer visitors, for they'll never return here again. They'll go to some other place where there are a few trees. I know that."

The unhappy official, who, after all, had been subjected to pressure from another group who insisted the tree trees be removed, and, it must in fairness be said, who was in no personal way interested in the problem, threw his hands in the air.

"Can I help it if the visitors won't like 5 it?" he shouted. Then on reflection. "I hope it don't keep 'em away, though, - but, hell, it won't. That's only your own opinion." That was an

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unwise thing to say, as he later found out, because Dad marched straight out of his office determined to prove that it wasn't just one man's opinion but a good deal more than that.

A few moments later, Dad strode into the offices of the daily newspaper. Here he was greeted with open arms, for locally he had the reputation of being "good copy." He submitted his plea for saving the tress, then went home and penned a dozen or more letters to visitors who had been coming to the resort town for years. The result was even better than he had anticipated. Letters poured in by the dozens, his plea having been trebled by word-of-mouth circulation. Dad was smart enough to see that the letters were directed unopened to the mayor and to the editor of the paper. Shortly afterward, he was summoned to the office of the Mayor. But before he went, he grabbed a copy of the latest edition of the local paper. In that issue the editor had published letters from former visitors in which were emitted howls of editorial displeasure at the officials who were trying to "efface the beauty of the town" and "destroy the very atmosphere" that had once made the resort a favorite vacation spot.

"I showed that paper to the mayor," Dad remembers, "and I know I had him licked. " But Dad, in whom compassion is a noteworthy virtue, let the official, who was certainly on a spot, have his way to some extent. The result was that, as a palliative gesture toward the pressure group, some of the limbs that interfered with the wires were removed, and everyone was satisfied.

Dad is a former trader in fruits and some say that [?] his long years in that business, which, by the way, were profitable ones, helped make him realize the value of publicity, and in that they are not far wrong.

Back in 1896, when he was a Liverpool, England, fruit importer, he represented over a hundred fruit growers in New York state who shipped their finest apples to him. Often, even before the barrels were rolled from the Liverpool docks, Dad had turned over his consignment at a neat profit. When he decided to deal in pears (he claims he was the

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first to import pears from this country) he posted handbills, announcing his purpose. That was his first taste of the fruits of publicity. And it brought the merchants in droves to his warehouse. He tried this out on tomatoes, and he virtually took the entire trade away from those importers who were getting tomatoes from France. From then on, since he had built up a comfortable bank balance from his association with both, Dad was sold on two things: publicity, and the United States. In 1904, leaving England forever behind him, he entered the Dominion of Canada, later he came down to this resort town deep in the [southern ?] [Southern?] Appalachians, after first marketing time in Denver, Delaware, where he obtained his citizenship papers.

Dad opened a fruit store immediately after he settled in town. He has been in the same store now for over ten years. It isn't much of a store, as stores go. Ten by twelve at the most, it clings to the side of the town's largest department store like a barnacle to the side of an ocean liner. But Dad loves every brick in it and is proud of it, for he [?] owns it himself, which is something, and in spite of its size, or lack of size, it does a measure of business which is the envy of the larger stores, which is everything.

To this latter end Rex, Dad's son, is indirectly responsible. For it is the publication of his weekly letters to Dad that acquaints the summer people with Dad's qualities and, incidentally, sends customers to his Dad's market to see for themselves what manner of man is being extolled. For that is just what Rex does. He extolls his dad's virtues and the old man has many. And Rex, like his dad, is an old hand at publicity. A former publicity director for the Royal Canadian Railway company at twenty-one, and since secretary to the Prime Minister of Canada, historian, copy writer, and again publicity director, he has mastered the art of self-expression, persuasion, and salesmanship.

Back in the days, twenty-five years ago, when Englishmen immigrated to Canada by the thousands, Rex's fine Italian hand was more than a little remotely mixed up in the matter. Dad even goes so far as to [?] insist that the entire influx was due solely to the letters of publicity which Rex wrote weekly to the London Times. Now Rex's letters to his

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father, published every week, have become an institution in Dad's home town. The men nod their heads in affirmation of his homely philosophies, and the women wipe their eyes as they read, and breath a silent prayer that their own sons may some day spout such fruity truths.

My dear pay Dad: (writes Rex)

One of the most foolish of all weaknesses we humans are prone to is to get all flustered over a lot of silly fears. [It's?] bad enough when some timid individual lays awake o'night fretting about what may or may not happen tomorrow or next month but when the whole country gets the jitters over the European 9 situation or something else equally remote it is time we were all subjected to a good dousing of common-sense.

We need more courage. Fear is at the bottom of ninety-nine percent of troubles and ninety-nine time times out of a hundred the thing we feared doesn't come to pass.

We should experience a change of heart and renew our faith - faith in the inherent goodness of a land which could be flowing with milk and honey, so to speak.

I often think of you when I hear some timid soul whining and wondering what in the world is going to happen to them in their old age. You chose the one sure way to Old Age Security - a way brightened by a cheerful outlook on life and a spirit of helpfulness. You refuse to be daunted by adversity and you have shown the courage to start all over again on your own feet. [You?] make your own old age pension fund and your idea of WPA " W ill P erserve P ersevere A lways."

Stick to it, Dad, and - KEEP SMILING!

Your living pal,

REX. [??]

Aside from being a "one man publicity bureau" for his own business as well as for his community, Dad is recognized for his own sterling, worthwhile qualities. Is there a civic event, he immediately proffers his time and whatever else is demanded of him. He has a pat on the head and an apple or orange for the children, and a smile and a good word for their elders. He beautifies the parkway fronting his store with beds of flowers, which he plants with extreme care and shelters with a brood-hen's affection in the spring, then plucks [?] indiscriminately in the summer for whoever stops to admire. He wears the same smile for his neighbors, Jew, Gentile and Negro. He condemns never: he criticizes frequently, in a constructive manner. Summer people, the only reason for his town's [existence?], make a [mecca?] of his shop. On the eve of last Christmas, he received, by actual count, one hundred and sixty-one greeting cards from former visitors, then wintering in a deeper [south?]. It was to please those persons that he had valiantly warred against the removal of the trees. It was to these same people that he wrote often, inviting them again to share the cool comfort of a summer in the mountains, and asking them to say a good [work?] word for his community to their friends and fellow vacationists.

The way Dad has taken over the adoption of the town and its environs has endeared him to the hearts of the people, not to mention the [CHAMber of Commerce Commerce .

The townspeople love Dad for it. They gave concrete evidence of this when old Mrs. Rydell died four years back. Then, his sorrow was everyone's sorrow. From the neighbors came cakes and baked hams and visits and twenty-four-hour attendance. From the business men came flowers and expressions of condolence. And, in a mere abstract form, from the summer people came cards and written measures of sympathy.

At the time, Dad outwardly appeared his usual self, except that his five-foot frame seemed more shrunken than before, and his manner just a little bit more solicitous. But he had a word for everybody, a reply to each[?] each of the cards. During the day he walked over

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to his market from whence he brought apples and grapes and boxes of his finest candies for the women who came to help him in his dark hour. At the services he sat quietly and silently; and at the grave he decked the freshly turned earth with a neatly tied cluster of his own flowers. Afterward, he went home with his sons for a short rest, leaving his tiny market in the care of a needy neighbor woman, who, by the way, has served as his assistant ever since.

When Dad came back, he went to live with an English family, also from his birthplace, Liverpool, in whose house he has resided ever since. He has a room of his own there, a room just a bit too full of furniture, for Dad insisted on using his own things, and there are 12 enough of these to fill to bursting a good deal more space than Dad has at present. But, Dad says, he's content, in spite of his crowed crowded quarters, because with his won things about him he doesn't so keenly feel the breaking up of his own home. "Besides," he says, "home is a state of mind, not a fetish of room or other conventional nicities. Anyway, I have other things to fill my mind with."

Fruits, people, publicity, philosophy - those are the things he speaks of. Little things, perhaps, says Dad, but during the week his existence is full to the brim with the activities they combine to create.

That [is?] one reason why he has kept that needy woman in his store as an assistant. Another is that as his opinion is valued, especially on matters pertaining to publicity, he is asked about a good deal. Not long ago he was asked to speak at a meeting of members of the local Chamber of Commerce. This was right down Dad's alley, for he had a story he had been wanting to tell. As he took his place behind the speaker's rostrum, which, by the way, came nearly up to his chin, he was received with a burst of applause. As Dad spoke he turned back the years and told his audience about a little girl he used to know in his native England. "She was eight years old," Dad said, "and now she is a woman nearing her fifties. One day, down at the docks, 13 I saw her crying. I gave her several apples, found that she was lost, got in touch with her parents, and restored her safely home. Well,

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sir, that little girl came to visit me every day until I shortly afterward left England to come to this country. Then I lost track of her. Imagine, then, my surprise to get a letter from her only last week. She, too, is in this country now. Said she remembered my kindness, my efforts on her behalf those many, many years ago. When she learned where I was, she got in touch with me. She says one day she shall visit me. There, now. If by a smile and a good word to a lassie of eight, in the distant past, I have made a personal friend of long standing, and perhaps will be instrumental in bringing another visitor to this resort town, just think what you can accomplish by practicing a similar role with the hundreds of persons you meet during one tourist season. You say you want to boost your town! Well, I say you can best do that by following the principle I have laid down for you. Smile and do good works. It costs nothing and pays big dividends, even if you measure those things on a basis of trade value alone."

Dad has a way of putting his point over. During the summer to come, many a member who listened to Dad's words will put his scheme into practice. Everyone promised that, and voted Dad an expression of thanks for appearing before them. Shortly afterward there appeared the following article in one of the 14 towns' magazines , published under the subheading "Distributed Free to Residents and Visitors in 'The Land of the Sky.'"

A TRIBUTE FITTING TO "DAD" RYDELL

There is a wide difference between a "mere man" and a "character." If an artist were seeking for a "subject" for a painting he would not want a pretty man or one carved out of wood, but he would ask himself, does this man have strong personality, has he character lines in his face? What does he know, what does he do, what has he done? If I paint him on my canvas will he impress the passer-by? Wherein does he differ from the "common herd ? " Is he generous, kindly wideawake? Is he useful in the community community ? Does he have an opinion? Can he express it? Of course, he is a " good fellow " , but is he a "good man?" Ther's a [?] difference . Does he seek to promote other, or just himself, at the expense of others? If you met him on the highway, would he be a thug, or a roadhog,

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or a good Samaritan? Would he betray a friend for thirty pieces of silver? Does he meet with brethren of the church on the Lord's Day in the house of worship and does he, by precept and example, do a noble part?

Such a one is Dad Rydell of Summitsville, N.C., and I have painted his picture for you.

Such publicity does Dad no harm. In fact, it has not a little to do with the fact that in summer, when the tourists are in town, Dad's store of delicacies overflows the narrow restrictions of the little market and spreads over five square feet of sidewalk on the outside. Dad could easily enlarge his business and make it pay. But, he says, he's satisfied with things as they are. "There's only me and I won't be around long," is the way he puts it. "I've had my day and now I'm content to ease off in a small way. Anyway, I make plenty of money as it is. That is, I mean I make enough to pay for my room and board, bank a little, and have enough left over to take a trip down to see Rex occasionally. What more could a body want?"

It is this sane, calm way of looking at things that have endeared him to his friends and neighbors and to his sons. And that, Dad says, is about all he cares about - friendships, neighbors, public good works - they are his whole existence; those things and religion. For Dad thinks that religion to be the basis of them all. He himself attends the local, weather beaten Baptist church, where on Sunday he passes the collection plate. When services are over he posts himself near the door, his diminutive body lost in the outflowing stream of worshipers, his affable voice drowned in the scuffle of scraping feet. But the congregation knows just where Dad will be. Half of them stop to pass the time of the day. Many of them linger longer to listen to the bit of philosophy Dad always spouts as an aftermath to the sermons. And the queerest thing of all is the way the younger members of the congregation crowd around him. High school freshmen who even at their tender years can look over the top of Dad's head, stop for a word of greeting: and giggling giggling eighth eighth -grade girls, pushed forward by their doting mothers [mutter?] chaste good mornings. Of course, these same youngsters may drop by Dad's market on Monday and

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attempt to wheedle him out of an apple or a candy bar, but the old man likes to have them around anyway, and he is sure they'd stop for a word or two on Sunday morning even if he were in the chicken feed business.

In his kindly, half-egotistical way, he argues it. "Sure they play on my kindness, and they like to publicize themselves by being seen around me.

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But I'm certain that they really love me. Why, my own son is like that. I mean he loves me and wants to publish the fact to the entire world. No, I don't mean Rex. It's the other one. Not long ago, I got a letter from him. ' Dad ' , he said, I love you just as much as Rex does. But I can't write the way he does. I haven't got all those fancy words at my command. Just the same I love you as such as he does, and, by the way, I wish you would get this letter published, like you do his, so that the people in your town would know that I do. ' And he ended the letter with, KEEP SMILING DAD, ' in capitals, just like Rex does, and signed it, ' Your loving pal JOE. '"